

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly.

My name is Howard Phengsomphone, I am from West Hartford. I have been living in West Hartford more than three decades. I came to the United State as a political refugee from the Southeast Asian country of Laos after the fall of Saigon during Vietnam War. I have been involved with the Asian community for a long time, as paid staff and as a volunteer.

I am here today as a citizen of the United States and as a Connecticut resident. You probably know that Asian Pacific Americans (APA) represents one of the fastest growing minority populations in the United States, with a 65% increase over the past 10 years. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, an estimate of 157,000 Asian Pacific Americans call Connecticut their home. There are approximately 164 non-English home languages throughout Connecticut school systems and many of those are Asian languages. Additionally, 24% of the state's population is immigrants or children of immigrants, who contribute to Connecticut's well-being. Non-citizen immigrants and Asian Pacific Americans alike would be without a voice in state government if this funding of the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commissions is reduced or eliminated.

The Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission began in year 2008, and many works have since been undertaken. There are a lot of unmet needs of the Asian Pacific American community in CT, such as mental health, health and addiction services, immigration, English language instruction, economic development, housing, access to courts, and civil rights. We need APAAC to promote political empowerment of the APA community, including culture programs for educational and economic development purposes, providing cultural awareness and celebration of the contributions of the APAs to Connecticut. More importantly, Asian Pacific Americans need increased participation in Federal programs. We need research and data collection for APA populations, and greater public and private sector and community involvement in improving the health and well-being of Asian Pacific Americans.

As one of the representatives of Laotian American community and a member of the Southeast Asian American Coalition of Connecticut, I am requesting you as my representatives to give Asian Pacific American a chance to grow and have the same opportunity as other Americans. It's important that we provide our communities with equal opportunities now to avoid the tax payers paying high costs in the future.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and consideration on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Howard Phengsomphone